

# Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire  
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*Commissioner*

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## From Your Commissioner...

### **Elite Dairy Herd Dispersed, but Farm Will Continue**

On a damp and dismal November day last week one of New Hampshire's top dairy herds was auctioned off and its animals scattered to farms all over the Northeast.

Boggy Meadow Farm in Walpole offered up nearly 600 head of Holstein cows, heifers and calves and they were sold off one by one over an eight-hour stretch. With a highly organized auctioneering crew and a relatively small number of buyers bidding the animals changed hands at a phenomenal rate of about one every 45 to 50 seconds.

They went high, too, to the astonishment of many onlookers mindful of recent lousy milk prices and tight economic conditions on dairy farms everywhere in the U.S. But top genetics, high production records and superior udders and conformation drove the bidding up.

Recently fresh young cows typically brought \$1,800 to \$2,200, and few animals in milk went for less than \$1,000. The top cow sold for \$3,700, while an Amish buyer took a dozen fancy large-framed cows at around \$3,000 a head.

Boggy Meadow Farm consists of 500 acres of some of the best cropland in the Northeast, all protected under a conservation easement. It's been operated by the Cabot family, which this fall reluctantly decided to exit the dairy business while continuing its artisanal cheese enterprise, Fanny Mason Cheese, on the premises.

While the Cabots no longer will milk cows the farm will go forward as a working dairy operation, fortunately.

Peter and Mike Barrett, father and son, well-known dairymen in the Connecticut Valley region, will tie Boggy Meadow with a large operation they have just across the river in Westminster, VT. Mike has signed a lease on the Walpole property that includes all the cropland and farm buildings, and he'll keep the farm's labor force on the job.

All Barrett heifers will be raised and calved out at the Walpole location, then move to Westminster for subsequent lactations. It's planned to be milking about 200 first-calf animals at Boggy Meadow, and Mike Barrett purchased young 50 cows in the sale to boost numbers there. And he'll provide the milk for the Fanny Mason Cheese plant.

For Peter Barrett, the Walpole connection is a homecoming of sorts, for he operated a dairy farm in Keene for many years before moving 20 miles west to Vermont a decade ago. The Keene property is now covered with subdivisions and commercial development.

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A Massachusetts-based outfit is looking for New Hampshire farmers interested in joining its natural beef program. Northeast Family Farms has a strict set of specifications that producers must meet and it prices cattle that meet its requirements based on the previous week's USDA slaughter report data.

Included in the specifications are traceability, identification, diet, health and handling provisions. Animals must be traditional English beef breed (straight or crossbred), can be steers or heifers, hit a carcass weight of between 550 and

850 pounds by 26 months of age and grade USDA Choice to fetch top price.

Currently Northeast Family Farms is buying six steers per week, with most coming out of New York State. Contact Bryan Petrucci at 413-229-0276 for more info.

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Whether it's Concord or Washington, big changes are coming in the composition of legislative agricultural committees as a result of this month's election results. Several longtime members of the New Hampshire House Committee on Environment and Agriculture won't be back for the upcoming session and the panel will definitely be led by a new chairman.

Leadership of the U.S. Senate ag committee shifts to Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, long an advocate of greater USDA focus on conservation, with Sen. Pat Leahy of Vermont, a key dairy policy player, next in line with the majority. On the House side, Rep. Collin Peterson of Minnesota, a supporter of traditional commodity support programs, takes the chair.

Whether the Northeast gets more representation on these committees than in recent years was still up in the air late last week.

**Steve Taylor, Commissioner**